

Pacific University

CommonKnowledge

Volume 8 (2008)

Interface: The Journal of Education, Community
and Values

12-1-2008

Why The Shoemaker's Children have Flip-Flops

Pat McGregor

Recommended Citation

McGregor, P. (2009). Why The Shoemaker's Children have Flip-Flops. In J. Barlow (ed.). *Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values* (vol. 8. pp. 321-329). Forest Grove, OR: The Berglund Center for Internet Studies. (Original work published online in 2008).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values at CommonKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Volume 8 (2008) by an authorized administrator of CommonKnowledge. For more information, please contact CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu.

Why The Shoemaker's Children have Flip-Flops

Rights

Terms of use for work posted in CommonKnowledge.

Why the Shoemaker's Children have Flip-Flops



by Pat McGregor

Once upon a time, in a city far, far away (do *you* know the way to San Jose?), there was a computer professional who, because she lived in a very safe neighborhood, left the sliding door on her patio open about 6 inches one night because she liked the air, and, frankly, she had burnt a bag of microwave popcorn and wanted to get the smell out before morning.

She went to bed at 4 a.m. because, like many computer professionals, she is at heart a night owl, and because she had just gotten a brand new computer from Dell and she was gleefully transferring information from her old computer to her new computer. The big Dell box was sitting in her living room, empty component boxes scattered around, because we never pick up and put away the wrapping paper carefully when we're opening presents, now, do we?

Because of the defects that had caused her to get a new computer in the first place, she was transferring data by using 4 GB flash drives rather than a network or other handy gadget.

Finally she went to bed, because the werewolf movie she was watching while she worked was just too stultifying and because, after all, it *was* 4 am. Even though the next day was Saturday, she had a new computer to play with (and because she's not 20 anymore and all-nighters get harder with every decade).

The next morning she woke up about 11 am, made a couple of important phone calls while she was sitting in bed, and wandered out into the living room in her jammies where she would check email and then make breakfast. Email is first in priority to every real computer geek, after all.

Hmm. There were no power cords stretched across the living room floor. Blink. There were no computers sitting on the couch. She looked again. No, they were really gone. She looked at the wallet next to the place where the computers had been. Even though she had a credit card casually tucked into the flap of the wallet, it was still there! So were the money and ID's and other credit cards. So was her new BlackBerry! Even all the legal copies of the software that had come with the new laptop were still there! (some of us have weird priorities, OK?)

She called the police. While they were on the way she changed into real clothes, and then called a friend who is online almost all the time. She walked this friend through changing the passwords on important systems such as her bank, her PayPal account, her credit card companies, and some others with real money attached. She thought she had been careful not to let the computer remember those passwords, but it is *so* tempting just to say *yes* when the browser asks "*Do you want me to remember this password?*"

And while she had also guarded the machines so they need a password to boot up, such things are breakable. In her heart of hearts she hoped that the failing power source and corrupted hard drive on the seven-year-old computer would fail completely on the crooks, but she knew that was a mean and uncharitable and probably completely unrealistic thought.

Then she called her apartment complex to notify them of the break-in, and they dispatched a locksmith immediately to change all the locks on her doors.

And then, because like every child of the television age she had seen every *CSI* and *Law and Order* show ever made, she sat quietly in the rocking chair in her living room, reading a book to distract herself, carefully *not disturbing the scene*.

When the officers arrived, they went through all the usual questions, including "was this door locked?" The security expert admitted that no,

the slider was open, but it was her ritual to latch the screen and all the other doors and windows before she went to bed. She couldn't say for sure that she had latched and locked everything else that night, because it was a habitual act and she couldn't distinguish one night from the other in her head. There was a slit in the screen by the slider latch, which may have been how the burglars got in.

The police were a little bit surprised that the computer professional had slept through it all, but she explained that she had taken A Leading Night-time Cold Medicine before she went to bed. She also had a fan running in her room for white noise to cover noises like, say, her apartment being broken into. (Although entering a domicile while a person is present makes the crime First Degree Burglary, surprising a burglar in the act can end up with the victim getting hurt. Our heroine is glad that she slept through it, all in all.)

She did have to explain that the chaos in the living room (all those boxes, you know) was hers, and that the computers had been tidily picked up, including unplugging the power cords and disconnecting the network cables, and that was all that was missing.

When she was asked if either computer had any distinguishing characteristics, she said that the new one was bright pink. Did she know anything like serial numbers, etc? She handed the officer a copy of the invoice for the computer, which included the serial number for the CPU, the unique MAC address for the Ethernet card, and other details about the internals of the machine.

The officer explained that his CSI (crime scene investigator, and despite everything else it was kind of a thrill to hear this jargon being thrown around in real life instead of just television) was on the way. In the meantime, the officer asked more questions and checked all the doors and windows. All of them turned out to be unlocked.

Then the officer dusted the surge protector for fingerprints, since to remove the power cords the thief would have had to use both hands to get the plugs out.

When the CSI arrived, they decided that, unlike on television, they couldn't get a clear print off the textured surface of the surge protector. After all, these things are textured for two reasons — to give people a better grip to insert and remove cords, and because it *prevents fingerprints from showing up*. Sigh.

Once she had permission, the victim had gotten a glass of water and was still sitting quietly in the rocker in her living room, staying out of the officers' way. One of their radios squawked something about a stolen car, and dread struck at the security expert's heart. She ran to the back window and looked out — and her parking space was empty. No, really. There was nothing there. She looked again, to be sure she was looking at the right carport, but, no, there was no car there.

Because our computer professional can relish a good ironic scene as much as the next person, she went back into the living room where the officers were making notes, drawing diagrams, and fingerprinting the screen doors and slider.

"You'll need to add something else to that list of things stolen, officers." After the expected "Oh?" she said, "They got my car, too."

A certain amount of scurry resulted. It turned out that her main set of keys, with the house keys and other people's house keys, was still hanging on the key rack by the front door. So she surmised they had taken her spare set, which was on the kitchen counter where she had left them when she returned from traveling the few days before.

When the officer started asking questions about the stolen car, she described the license plate to him and then took her spare insurance card out of her wallet. He copied down the VIN numbers and other identifying information.

At this point the apartment manager and the locksmith arrived, and when the police gave permission, all the locks were changed, including the mailbox lock. (The police and the computer professional were amazed at the promptness with which the apartment management took care of this. While this was the first burglary in the complex in nine years, they were clearly prepared to deal with it.)

While one officer was out photographing the carport with nothing in it, he noticed that the screen in the spare window was lying in the bushes. Had she noticed it missing before? No, the last time she had closed and locked the window, after a friend's visit, it was still in place.

The officers took the screen away to be more closely examined. They gave her a card with the police report number on it and told her someone would be in touch. (The Crime Scene technician also told her that, because no one was hurt, it would be at least four months before anyone got around to analyzing the fingerprints. Sigh. Not like *CSI* at all.)

Our computer professional sat down and made all the other phone calls that had to be made: insurance company, family, people who were expecting email from her, and so on. When the mail came, it included a letter from Dell with the details of her new computer and a notice that it should have been there already. That ironic moment wasn't as much fun, but glancing over the duplicate invoice she noticed that her new computer had LoJack! If the robbers turned on the computer anywhere near a wireless network, the computer would phone home!

The police were very interested in hearing this. If the robbers turned the computer on, instead of just wiping the hard drive clean with a magnet and selling it immediately, they might be able to find it.

They were also glad that her car had a FasTrak toll pass transponder on it, so that if the car went over any of the bridges in the area or any other areas that recorded FasTrak data, they would know.

Chances are good that her car, a hybrid, will be recovered. Hybrids are not as attractive to chop shops as other cars because the parts are not in high demand. Fingers crossed. But because it is likely to be dumped off somewhere, the police encouraged her to put the car's description and distinguishing marks on every blog and mailing list she can, so that more people will be thinking about it and the chances of it being found are higher. (What a cool expansion of the Neighborhood Watch concept!)

Today our computer professional is kicking herself for having not done all the protective items in the list below. Her computers had flip-flops instead of good, sturdy shoes. What's your excuse?

Things to consider

General Life:

- Lock your doors and windows (but we should all know this by now.)
- Consider one of those alarms that go off when you open a door or window. They are inexpensive and very noisy.
- If you want to leave your sliding patio doors open and you live on the first or second floor, buy a dowel and cut it 4-5" shorter than your door is wide, and drop it in the track. It will prevent anyone from opening the door any wider.
- Keep duplicate copies of your paperwork for your possessions on hand for the police report. It makes the report go much more smoothly and you won't feel like so much of an idiot.
- Have renter's or home owner's insurance.
- Keep an inventory *on paper* of your possessions and their serial numbers.
- Don't leave boxes with tempting contents in plain sight from your windows.

Computer Security

- **Back up your data! Back up your data! Back up your data!**

- Our professional only had 8GB out of 38 on her flash drives when this happened, so she's lost all her family pictures, soft copies of her books, articles, and the cookbook she has written, tax returns, and so on and so on. Since she's hunting for a new job, she was happy her resumes and other material were still there, but it might have been a total loss.
- Protect everything with strong passwords. The best passwords aren't words or numbers related to you, are at least 8 characters long, and have at least 3 of the following 4 symbols:
 - capital letter
 - lowercase letter
 - number
 - "Special" — one of these characters (!#*&)({+@~^) or others like them
- Don't write your passwords down and don't tape them to the bottom of the keyboard, on a sticky note nearby, or anything else!
- **Back up your data!**
- At least put passwords on accounts with administrative rights — this also helps so that if someone comes into your machine from the network — it will be harder to assume your privileges and use your machine for nefarious purposes.
- Don't store your passwords to important places, such as your bank, on your machine. If you have a security "wallet," such as

the ones Symantec and Norton offer, you can consider using it, but you have to protect it with a strong password!!! A good way to make a strong password is to use something you find memorable and do a substitution process on it. It's pretty easy, actually:

- Say you graduated from college in Boston in 1987. Your password might be:
Boston87 morphed into **B0s+on87**
- Use words and symbols that make sense to you — for example, substituting the "Zero" (0) for an Oh (o), or the Plus Sign (+) for the Tee (t)
(Don't use this example! Make up one of your own.)
- You can use the same password on multiple systems if you've made up a good strong password and you change them once in a while.
- Consider using security functions built into programs such as your online checking software or other programs where you have stored personally sensitive data. Some programs, for example, let you password-lock your data files in your financial software when you close the program. The data is encrypted and can't be decrypted without the password.
- **Back up your data!** Terabyte drives that will hold everything are now less than \$100 and well worth the effort.

PS:

Our computer professional's insurance company authorized an immediate replacement for her laptop, both because it is a critical tool for her work and because she's job hunting. They've also authorized a rental car for three weeks while they wait to see if the car shows up. Check your insurance and consider such coverage.

It *is* kind of creepy that someone was in the apartment and she slept through it. And all her friends have been very kind to offer her company and couches to sleep on. She's going to be OK.